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Parenting Through Cancer

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Parenting Through Cancer

An Evidence-Based Guide for Healthcare
Professionals Supporting Families

Leonor Rodriguez

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway



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Every effort has been made in preparing this book to provide accurate and up-to-date information that is in accord with accepted standards and practice at the time of publication. Although case histories are drawn from actual cases, every effort has been made to disguise the identities of the individuals involved. Nevertheless, the authors, editors, and publishers can make no warranties that the information contained herein is totally free from error, not least because clinical standards are constantly changing through research and regulation. The authors, editors, and publishers therefore disclaim all liability for direct or consequential damages resulting from the use of material contained in this book. Readers are strongly advised to pay careful attention to information provided by the manufacturer of any drugs or equipment that they plan to use.

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For: Mami, Mari, Olgui and Nina
Y a todos (as) en el Jardín de María

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Foreword

It could be very easily argued that in order to cope with cancer in your own life or that of someone you love, one must first understand cancer and all its depths, difficulties and nuances. Sadly, very often and for very many, even discussing the topic of cancer in a general light conversation, never mind focusing on its impact on self and others, can be a challenge. While this may or may not be the case for adults, the additional difficulties that arise in the cases of children, youth and their family members in coping with a parent with cancer really complicate and enhance the problem and are at the most personal level.

Thus, this book by Leonor Rodriguez is particularly welcome and timely. As you read through it, you will see the way the author brings a new and very comprehensive understanding to what is known (based on our current knowledge), unknown and subject to other limitations, about the impact of parental cancer on children, young people and families. Utilising research she provides a longitudinal account of the impact of cancer through the differing stages of the illness. The book also contains a very useful description of the role and impact of culture and international contexts of how families experience parental cancer.

One key benefit for me regarding this book is that it is based in the real world of people's lives and experiences. By exploring both the science and knowledge relating to the illness, it also focuses on the issue of social relatedness of humanity and the importance of caring about and caring for those impacted directly and indirectly. The book explores in very pragmatic ways how to support children, young people and families as they strive to cope as well as highlighting existing interventions, which are resources, intended to be of practical help. Importantly the book does not shy away from the 'starkness' of the sadly too frequent outcome of death resulting from the progression of the illness.

One section of the book is fully dedicated to the very sensitive issue of death and bereavement and methods to support children, young people and families who experience parental death from cancer. This is particularly relevant. It focuses on ways for not just surviving the impact of cancer but even ways for those affected to thrive despite it. Towards the end of the book Dr Rodriguez highlights the crucial issue of burden and empathy fatigue, which all too often can take its toll on the carer(s). While personal self-care for practitioners is advocated and the importance of ensuring 'helpers are helped in order to help others' with the risk of burden and burnout rightfully signposted, this is rightfully situated within the wider context of the book.

Importantly for me and hopefully for you, by engaging with the book, one learns so much that is new and contemporary, but the reminder of the importance of valuing crucial support to and from others in coping with parental cancer is really vital. In doing so, one comes to see social support as the 'secret

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sauce', which enables children, youth and families to keep going. Another crucial benefit of the book is that it is readable for many stakeholders, from children, youth and families to professionals and non-professionals, alike. That is not to suggest in any way that by engaging with the recommended practices contained within the book one loses sight of the person with cancer. On the contrary, I believe this book is both very positive and yet totally sensitive to all the needs of those impacted by parental cancer. This is a right and fitting legacy, which accrues from this book not just for now but for the future.

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